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## What It Means to Work in Partnership at Northeastern University

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## WHAT IT MEANS TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP AT NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

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Welcome to this special issue of *Teaching and Learning Together in Higher Education*, which showcases eight projects from Northeastern University in which faculty, staff, and students explore what it means to work in partnership. The idea for this special issue arose in 2019, when Alison Cook-Sather delivered the keynote address at Northeastern's annual Conference for Advancing Evidence-based Learning. As Alison and conference presenters discussed the nuances of student-educator partnership in their work, both challenges and affordances, we recognized an opportunity to share Northeastern's experience with a wider audience.

Many issues of *TLTHE* are organized around a particular theme (i.e. creating brave spaces [[Issue 18](#)]; belonging, trust and hope [[Issue 22](#)]; and risk [[Issue 24](#)]) or grow out of a common program (i.e., *TLTHE* [Issue 5](#), [Issue 7](#), and [Issue 17](#)). In contrast, the essays in this volume describe projects that evolved independently of each other, some with specific attention to the Students as Partners literature (i.e., Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Cook-Sather et al., 2019) and some without knowledge of it. They represent partnerships centered around research, curriculum development, teaching assistantship, and co-authorship. What they have in common is educators who are willing to trust students with significant responsibility and input into shared work, and students who are willing to take on the roles they are offered, often despite initial hesitancy. Some explanation of the Northeastern University contextual factors that engender partnership work with students may help readers understand why these relationships have arisen at our institution.

Northeastern has long identified experiential learning as its signature pedagogy, most prominently enacted in its cooperative education program through which the majority of undergraduates spend two or three semesters in full-time work placements. Other formal experiential learning opportunities include service-learning, undergraduate research, and multiple international experiences. As Becca Berkey states, in the essay included in this issue co-authored with Ava Gallo, it is embedded in the “ethos of Northeastern... to trust students with ‘real’ work from the moment they step foot on campus.” In settings where learners engage in experiential learning through co-ops, service learning, and other settings beyond the classroom, students may return to the classroom with knowledge of current practices in their fields that is outside the expertise of their professors. This can challenge faculty to recognize and capitalize on students' real-world knowledge in their classroom learning, potentially making the positionality of faculty as expert and student as novice more fluid. This familiar Northeastern experience creates fertile ground for partnership relationships in which both faculty and students bring value to shared work.

In 2018, Northeastern introduced [SAIL](#) (Self-Authored Integrated Learning), a framework and platform to help students as well as educators recognize and articulate the development of knowledge and skills across all experiences. The SAIL framework includes five domains—global mindset, intellectual agility, well-being, social consciousness & commitment, and

professional & personal effectiveness—and encourages learners to recognize and pursue growth in all dimensions through all life activities. The taglines of SAIL include, “Learning happens everywhere” and “Everyone is a learner and everyone is an educator.” These underlying tenets of SAIL reinforce the understanding that in effective partnerships, each member brings value to the work and all members can learn from each other, independent of their formal positions. Such beliefs are reflected in Gail Matthews-DeNatale’s statement, in her essay co-authored with Amy Cozart-Lundin and included in this issue, “I wanted to experiment with the traditional student-instructor power relationship because I suspected that interesting things might happen if the roles became more fluid.”

Despite the variety of experiences represented by the essays in this issue, common themes emerge. Multiple faculty authors use the words “disorienting” and “invigorating” to describe relaxing control in their roles as experts. Students speak of being initially uncertain that they are qualified to make substantive contributions, and acknowledge that having their ideas included in the work was a turning point in their sense of partnership. Of note is students’ use of phrases that indicate a sense of ownership (e.g. “our work”). Several of the essays discuss the challenges for faculty of flattening traditional hierarchical relationships in partnership projects, with multiple acknowledgements of the need for faculty to provide appropriate preparation and initial leadership to scaffold students’ abilities to succeed as substantive partners.

What follows are brief descriptions of each essay in this issue.

In “[\*\*AN AUTHORSHIP PARTNERSHIP WITH UNDERGRADUATES STUDYING AUTHORSHIP IN UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH EXPERIENCES\*\*](#),” former Northeastern students Lauren Abbott, Amy Andes, and Aneri Pattani, along with Professor of Chemistry Pam Mabrouk, describe and reflect on their joint research into undergraduate students’ understanding of authorship in research projects. Mabrouk explains her atypical decision to conduct most of her research over a 30-year career in partnership with undergraduate students. Mabrouk describes how she shifts her own role in working with students from providing necessary information to progressively stepping back as student partners take on more responsibility. The language student authors use expresses ownership of the work as do their descriptions of specific points at which their experiences of that ownership shifted.

In “[\*\*SERVICE-LEARNING SUCCESS ROOTED IN NETWORKS OF PARTNERSHIP CENTERED ON TEACHING ASSISTANT-INSTRUCTOR COLLABORATION\*\*](#),” Gail S. Begley, Teaching Professor in Biology and Nadia Sahli, Candidate for B.S. in Cell & Molecular Biology, discuss their work together in the seminar-style course, Inquiries in Biological Sciences, which includes a service-learning component. Like several other students in the partnership projects described in this issue, Sahli describes her surprise at the level of responsibility she was given in her Teaching Assistant role and the growth that ensued. Begley reflects on the critical role of preparation provided by the Service Learning Teaching Assistant program in enabling her to trust Sahli to manage relationships with service-learning partner organizations. Both Begley and Sahli describe critical points at which their roles shifted from Professor-Assistant to collegial partners.

In “[\*\*EMBRACING OPPORTUNITIES FOR OPENNESS IN ONLINE LEARNING\*\*](#),” Amy Cozart-Lundin, M.Ed. in eLearning and Instructional Design, and Gail Matthews-DeNatale, Lecturer in the

Graduate School of Education, trace the evolution of a partnership relationship through coursework to co-authorship following Cozart-Lundin's degree completion and beyond. Matthews-DeNatale reflects on the experience of shifting her own role from instructor to learner in full view of her class, and both describe Cozart-Lundin's development into an equal partner in authoring a book chapter about their shared class experience.

In "[HOW A MULTI-YEAR, MULTIFACETED, AND ITERATIVE PARTNERSHIP CAN CHANGE TEACHING, LEARNING & RESEARCH](#)," Ava Gallo, Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies + International Affairs, Master of Science in Security and Resilience Studies, Class of 2021 and Becca Berkey, Director, Community-Engaged Teaching and Research, reflect on their work together over a period of years and through multiple projects. Berkey describes her partnership with Gallo as growing naturally out of her own approach to teaching as viewing students as co-learners, while Gallo details the benefits of being trusted with responsibility for significant work. What is not made explicit in this essay is that Berkey is responsible for the conception of the Service-Learning Teaching Assistant role and training program at Northeastern, which is also discussed in the essay by Begley and Sahli in this issue.

In "[ILLUSTRATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION PARTNERSHIP FOSTERED BETWEEN FACULTY AND GRADUATE STUDENT](#)," Patricia Goodman, Faculty Lead for Cross-cultural Communication, and Zirui Yan, MS in Graduate Corporate and Organizational Communication, describe their partnership relationship in the design of an eportfolio component for a graduate program that serves primarily international students. Like other faculty authors in this issue, Goodman describes her partnership with Yan as growing out of an approach to teaching that is active and student-centered. In this particular program, however, a large proportion of students come from educational systems that are more based on rote learning, so the experience of shifting roles of educator and learner may be more pronounced. While Goodman describes their Eportfolio Learning Group as an "exercise in vulnerability," Yan highlights the growth in confidence that came from having her voice and ideas represented in the project.

"[THE POWER OF FOOD ON CAMPUS: A UNIQUE \(AND TASTY\) CO-CREATION](#)" describes a unique partnership among Maureen Timmons, Director of Dining Services, Christopher Bosso, Professor of Public Policy and Politics, and Allison Deyo, Candidate for the Masters of Public Policy in designing and presenting a "pop-up" course titled, Xperiential Food Literacy. This course is one of many collaborative efforts between Timmons and Bosso, who reflect on the benefits of connecting theory and practice through a collaboration between a full professor and an educator categorized as University staff. Deyo describes the role she played as a bridge between perspectives of instructors and students. All three gain insights into their dual roles as educators and learners through their partnership.

In "[LISTENING TO STUDENT VOICES AS A STEP TOWARD STRENGTHENING INCLUSIVE AND INTERCULTURAL TEACHING APPROACHES](#)," Lorna Hayward, Associate Professor of Physical Therapy, Aysha Alawadhi, Bachelor of Science in Industrial Engineering, 2020, and Flavia Fretias, Candidate Bachelor of Science in Business Administration 2021, report on the insights they gained through one-on-one conversations, in instructor-student dyads, about the experiences in college classes of these two individual students, one of whom is from Kuwait and one who

comes from an under-resourced urban Boston high school. Dr. Hayward positions these conversations in the larger context of her research into diversifying healthcare students and improving the inclusivity of health education in order to prepare healthcare providers that reflect the diversity of patients in the American healthcare system.

In “[STUDENTS AS PARTNERS AS A MODEL FOR RESEARCH ON REFLECTION AND COOPERATIVE EDUCATION](#),” Michelle Zaff, Esq., Associate Cooperative Education Faculty in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Sarah Klionsky, Former Cooperative Education Faculty, College of Science, Gail Matthews-DeNatale, Senior Associate Director, Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning through Research, Sarah Lam, Former Undergraduate Student, College of Science, and Rebecca Raffo, Former Undergraduate Student in the College of Social Science and Humanities describe their efforts to include student perspectives in the development of a reflection curriculum in the Cooperative Education program. In addition to reporting on insights gained from surveying students and working together, they reflect on their challenges of structuring a project in a non-hierarchical fashion.

The authors of these essays are grateful for this opportunity to present their work, and we thank Alison Cook-Sather for her invitation to compose this issue. We hope these essays inspire future opportunities for students to make substantive contributions, working in partnership with faculty and staff at our University and beyond.

## References

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